Brief history of Values Clarification: Origin, development, downfall, and reflections*

Apuntes para una historia de la Clarificación de valores: origen, desarrollo, declive y reflexiones

Juan P. DABDOUB, PhD. Assistant Professor. University of Navarra (*jdabdoub@unav.es*).

Abstract:

Education on moral values is an area that has caused controversy in the 20th and 21st centuries, in particular due to the social rejection of the possible indoctrination of students. Louis Raths' Values Clarification methodology was one of the most representative proposals that attempted to outline a moral education free of indoctrination. Without further examining philosophical arguments that have already been dealt with in numerous publications, this article holistically studies the history of this approach in order to learn from the efforts, challenges, victories, and failures of those who have preceded us in the task of educating citizens with moral convictions. The article begins by presenting the main points of psychologist Carl Rogers' theory that most influenced the origin of this methodology. It then introduces the social context in which the Values Clarification programme arises, a detailed description of its key points, the warm reception it received and, finally, the criticism and assessments that led to its dizzying downfall. To conclude, three brief reflections on moral education are presented, which, although not new, are reinforced by the study undertaken in this article.

Keywords: Values Clarification, moral values, moral education, character education, Carl Rogers, Louis Raths, Howard Kirschenbaum, United States.

Resumen:

La educación en valores morales es un ámbito que ha generado polémica en los siglos XX y XXI, especialmente por un rechazo social hacia el posible adoctrinamiento de los estudiantes. La metodología de Clarificación de valores de Louis Raths fue una de las propuestas más representativas que intentaron plantear una educación moral libre de adoctrinamiento. Sin profundizar en argumentos filosóficos que ya han sido tratados en numerosas publicaciones, el artículo estudia la historia de este planteamiento, para aprender de los esfuerzos, retos, victorias y fracasos de aquellos que nos han antecedido en la tarea de educar ciudadanos con convicciones morales. El artículo comienza exponiendo los puntos principales del pensamiento del psicólogo Carl Rogers que más influyeron en el origen de esta metodología. Después, se introduce el contexto social en el que surge el programa de la Clarificación de valores, una descripción detallada de sus notas esenciales, la buena acogida que recibió y, por último, las críticas y evaluaciones que condujeron a su vertiginoso declive. A modo de conclusión, se presentan tres breves reflexiones sobre la educación moral que, aunque no son novedosas, se ven reforzadas por el estudio realizado en este artículo.

Descriptores: Clarificación de valores, valores morales, educación moral, educación del carácter, Carl Rogers, Louis Raths, Howard Kirschenbaum, Estados Unidos.

1. Introduction

Over recent decades, many experts in education have stated that the great challenges and difficulties of society must be faced by influencing the moral education of citizens (Bernal et al., 2015; Damon, 2002; Lickona, 1991; Nucci et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the moral sense of education has been excluded in many educational systems for various reasons, including especially: a) a misunderstood relationship with religion, which excludes it from secular public education; b) the conviction that it makes no sense in an age where moral relativism reigns; c) or conceiving it as mere training that incapacitates ethical reasoning; among other aspects (Dabdoub et al., 2020).

Spain is no exception. Fuentes (2018) carried out a suggestive analysis of Spanish education law, starting with the LOECE (Organic law regulating the Statute of Schools) in 1980 and ending with the LOMCE (Organic law on the Improvement of Educational Quality) in 2013. His study revealed that morality is treated as something very residual in Spanish law, with vague and scarce names that have tended to disappear over time, leaving in its place the notion of value. Moreover, he considers that the current law is, in certain ways, in line with the Anglo-Saxon proposals from the 1970s and 1980s known as *values-free*, whereby the aim was to provide neutral moral education. Fuentes suggests that the principles of Spanish education law seem to be inspired by this movement,

both due to the primacy given to the concept of value and due to the importance given to moral autonomy.

The main values-free proposal of that time was the Values Clarification movement, which enjoyed years of success and dissemination that were only overcome by the outburst that made anything referring to this methodology disappear (Dabdoub, 2019). What was so attractive at the very inception of this approach and so repulsive in its downfall? What results were achieved? What lessons can be learned from this experience when proposing the moral aspect of education? Few analyses have been carried out on Values Clarification in this sense, with the exception of some studies of a markedly philosophical nature (Ellrod, 1992; Lipe, 1995; Medina, 2000; Sanderse, 2012). In this article, I intend to analyse the educational *experience* of Values Clarification, without downplaying the importance of philosophical studies, with the aim of encouraging deep and practical reflections that can inspire educational approaches and current legislation. Rather than detailing the moral theory of those who promoted Values Clarification, it is about better understanding the problem they faced, how they took on the challenge, and what results they achieved, so that we can build something better based on their experience.

The article begins by developing the points of Carl Rogers' thought that most influenced the origin of Values Clarification (Ellrod, 1992; Kirschenbaum, 1976; Pascual, 2014). It then introduces the social context in which the Values Clarification programme arises, a detailed description of its key points, the warm reception it received and, finally, the criticism and assessments that led to its dizzying downfall. By way of conclusion, three practical reflections for moral education are presented.

2. Rogers' inner rupture

Carl Rogers is considered one of the founders of humanistic psychology. This current is characterised by focusing on the personality as a development with freedom to make decisions, in search of meaning. Rogers (1964) believed that traditional values do not fit in well with the new world culture, which is increasingly leaning towards empirical science and moral relativism, and he wished to find a new approach to values that fitted the needs of his time.

This author focuses his discourse on *operative values*, those that have no cognitive or conceptual basis, but are manifested in behaviour by means of the "preference of the organism" (1973, p. 77). In parallel to Rousseau (2011), he states that the child has an innate prudence, a *wisdom of the body*. He states that children know what they like and, to a large extent, what is good for them, as if the organism itself were communicating what is best at any given time. However, many adults lose this innate wisdom as they are subjected to the demands, pressures and expectations of society. As individuals grow older, they begin to add the values that society communicates, or

in some cases imposes, to their operative values. Rogers calls these values *introjected value patterns* (1964). These are the values that come from sources such as schools, churches, government, peers, or artists. These sources say something about what our values should be. Making money, being smart, loving your neighbour, or drinking Coca-Cola are presented as desirable, whereas disobedience, sexual desires, or communism are presented as bad or undesirable.

Most of these introjected values come from people or institutions close to the individual. However, the source or evaluation of these values does not lie in the individual him or herself, but in something external. More often than not, the criterion for taking on these values lies in being esteemed, loved or accepted by the person or the collective that holds or proposes the value. Rogers (1973) states that there are often discrepancies between what our own identity and integrity tell us we should value and what others present to us as values. That is to say, we renounce what we consider moral in order to gain the affection or acceptance of others.

Thus, our ability to value falls into disuse, as we make use of the values of others. Over time, it becomes more and more difficult to listen to the inner voice that manifests the operative values, one loses confidence in one's own criteria, and one does not find assurance in one's personal experience. There may even be a scenario where our preferences, our operative values, are seen as threats if they contradict other values. These people, Rogers points out, end up rigidly embracing the values of society and lose the natural flexibility provided by operative values in each circumstance.

When taking on valuings from different sources, it is not uncommon to find people with contradictory or incompatible values. This leads to situations of instability where people are unable to discover what they really value, what is truly important to them. This causes the *inner rupture* that Rogers finds in the modern human being, who distrusts their own experience and intuition and loses contact with their inner world.

The aim of Rogers' psychotherapy sessions is for people to develop a valuing process that is based on their inner world, considering their experiences, feelings, thoughts and intuitions. It seeks to help people get to know themselves and, based on that, determine what they want and value.

It is not our aim to evaluate Rogers' thought, which, at the time, enjoyed great success, rather we highlight it due to the influence it had on the creators of the Values Clarification movement.

3. Social context

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many educators in the United States pointed out that students' academic inadequacies and behavioural problems were related to students' moral education. The moral relativism of the time and the

lifestyle based on luxury and well-being led to an attitude of cynicism and disillusionment among the youth. An inability to acquire feelings of authenticity and commitment to values that could give meaning to the new options offered by the modern world was detected in young people (Salls, 2007). One of the main concerns of moral education reformers at the time was students' inability to have and choose values (McClellan, 1999). As Rogers states, Americans in those years were deeply insecure given the *freedom of choice* concerning their life orientation, seeing the discernment of values, goals, or objectives as a problem.

At this time, the need arose to rethink moral education, but respecting the autonomy of each individual demanded by the social environment. Since the mid-20th century, there has been a widespread fear of *imposing* moral values or principles in schools. So as not to get into trouble with parents and directors of schools, teachers prefer to avoid this topic in class. Lickona (1991) presents this comment from a retired teacher interviewed in the 1950s giving us a glimpse of this widespread climate in American schools:

> I think the average classroom teacher wanted to go on teaching values. I remember getting into arguments, though, with some of my younger colleagues who'd say, 'My values aren't the same as your values'. I'd say, 'Well, what about values like honesty, kindness and responsibility; can't we teach those?' But I didn't get far; there was this new feeling that if we taught any kind of morality, we'd be 'imposing our values' on the children. (p. 8)

These circumstances presented a truly paradoxical challenge: that of implementing moral education that was *morally neutral*. In this sense, a proposal came to light that was considered to meet these requirements and which was very well received during the 1970s, namely Values Clarification.

4. Values Clarification

The Values Clarification programme was originally designed by the psychologist Louis Raths in the United States in the late 1960s and was a moral education model that was very popular from the late 1960s to the late 1970s (Sandin, 1992). Its first and most important reference was the book *Values and Teaching*, published by Louis Raths, Merrill Harmin and Sidney Simon in 1966. It was the book that "launched the educational movement regarding Values Clarification" (Pascual, 2014, p. 32).

This proposal arose from the conviction that the learning and behavioural problems presented by students in schools responded to an internal difficulty to acquire values given the increasingly complex conditions of modern life. The main difficulty came from the numerous, diverse, and — on many occasions — incompatible moral values that were found in the family, at school, in churches, or in the media (Raths et al., 1978).

Raths, Harmin and Simon (1978) identify the following characteristics or behaviours as being characteristic of people who have difficulty determining their

own values: apathetic, disinterested, un-enthusiastic people, who remain passive to their surroundings; they are interested in many things but for a short time, they do not persevere; they find it difficult to make decisions and do not know what they want; many are inconsistent in their interests or choices; they drift, letting themselves be carried along, without any plan or goal; they conform, seek comfort and go along with the dominant opinion; some are dissidents by default, finding their *raison d'être* in complaining and opposing others (p. 7).

A great deal of traditional moral teaching consisted of children adopting the values they were told to adopt. Faced with such a variety of opinions, it is only natural that children experience a certain bewilderment and ambiguity that makes it difficult for them to commit to any value. Another point of criticism concerning this traditional approach from the perspective of psychology is the inner rupture or crisis that can arise when the values that are to be acquired are merely presented and no effort is made to internalise them or to develop processes that allow us to individually verify if something is to be valued or not. Medina (2000) eloquently explains what Values Clarification wanted to achieve:

> Having values, yes, but those that stem from a serious and consistent personal reflection, without aiming for the subjective conclusions reached to be necessarily accepted by others. The aim: to help students overcome the crisis of meaning that traditional values have in their lives. (p. 5)

The new proposal by Raths consists of not imposing any values on children, but rather helping them find and choose the values they want to acquire, without being coerced. The aim is to seek a process that encourages personal identification with the values, so that the students make them their own and, therefore, increase their commitment and feeling of authenticity. His premise is clear: it is not effective to teach a specific set of values; instead, one must help develop the ability to determine one's own values. The goal is to help everyone *discover* their own personal values. To achieve this, the process must be autonomous, with collaboration from the teacher as a mere facilitator (Escámez, 1996). Gordillo (1992) describes the purpose of Values Clarification as follows:

> It is a series of strategies which are intended to help students clarify their feelings, interests and needs, so that, once transformed into values, they become self-confident, responsible, optimistic and able to establish appropriate relationships with society. (p. 92)

It is important to clarify Raths' concept of value. Values are not mere desires, interests, feelings or attitudes, rather something deeper. They are convictions, consisting of reason and affect, that show how a person decides to spend his or her life: "It is characteristic for the Values Clarification technique to include thoughtful consideration, prizing/cherishing and action. The objective is to reach the behaviour by first experiencing the feeling and clarity of ideas" (Pascual, 2014, p. 32). Part of Raths' method

consists of each individual being able to verify which beliefs, attitudes, activities or feelings can be considered values. To this end, it sets out seven verification criteria (Raths et al., 1978, p. 47):

1. *Having been freely chosen.* There is no room in this theory for values that are imposed by outside pressures.

2. *Having been chosen from among alternatives.* A real choice must exist, not a spurious one.

3. *Having been chosen after due reflection.* This excludes impulse or highly emotional choices from the category of values.

4. *Having been prized and cherished.* We exclude form the level of values those things which we have or do which we are not proud of and would rather not have or do — as when one chooses the least objectionable of several undesirable alternatives.

5. *Having been affirmed to others.* To be ashamed to affirm something is to indicate that one does not value it fully.

6. *Having been incorporated into actual behaviour.* A person who chooses democracy and never does anything to put that choice into practice may be said to have an attitude or belief about democracy but not a value.

7. *Having been repeated in one's life.* A one-shot effort at pottery making, for example, would not qualify as a value.

It is an inductive method which, through specific reflections, helps every student to get a better idea of themselves by offering a process to discover what they truly value. Students should apply the seven criteria to everything that has the potential to be of value to them. If any of them are not fulfilled, it should not be considered as a value. Different contributions to Raths' objective can be seen in each of the seven criteria: 1) encourage children to make choices without being coerced; 2) look for and examine different alternatives when they have to make a choice; 3) learn to reflect on the alternatives, taking responsibility for the consequences of each and every one; 4) encourage children to consider what it is they are looking for, desire or value; 5) give them the opportunity to make public affirmations of their choices, encouraging consistency; 6) turn the choice into some specific action; and, finally; 7) integrate the choice into their behavioural habits and patterns. According to Raths, Harmin and Simon (1978), the Values Clarification methodology has four key elements (pp. 4-5):

1. *Focus on life*: observe aspects of life that we sometimes do not consider in order to find what one truly values. This may involve personal issues, but social issues should also be included.

2. *Acceptance of the way things are*: it is important to accept the values that others may have, without judging them for being different to one's own. It is also not necessarily a matter of approving them. Values Clarification requires us to accept people as a whole, just

as they are. People also need to accept themselves. This process is about helping them to accept themselves as they are, being honest with themselves and with others, no matter how confusing or negative their thoughts and feelings may be.

3. *Opportunity for further thoughtful consideration*: in addition to acceptance, it is important to thoughtfully consider the matter further. This means one can make more informed choices and be more aware of what one wants and desires.

4. *Development of personal powers*: the overall message of this methodology is that thoughtful consideration of values allows for better integration of choices, desires and behaviour. In this way, each person is better equipped to steer their life in the direction they really want.

It is evident that, when implementing Values Clarification, a variety of values emerge among students and some of them may appear to be incompatible or contrary to each other. In this situation, students are likely to question whether it makes a difference which values they choose or wonder which value is better and why. On this point, Raths does not go into the issue of determining which value or values would be best. Quite the contrary, his aim is to make everyone thoughtfully consider what they think and feel using his seven criteria. Moreover, he insists that all people (and not all values) must be accepted, regardless of how *wrong* their value judgements may be.

5. Kirschenbaum's reform

An important figure in the development of the Values Clarification methodology was Howard Kirschenbaum, who enthusiastically received Raths' proposal. This author made an interesting point of criticism, stating that Raths' method could be conceived more as criteria than as processes. If they are accepted as mere *criteria*, they only help to verify whether an inner perception meets all the conditions to be a value. On the other hand, if they are considered as *processes*, they help to discover which inner perceptions can be considered values. Criteria help to *verify*, processes to *discover*.

Kirschenbaum and Simon (1973) carried out what could be considered the first reform of the Values Clarification methodology. We actually find the same seven steps as in Raths' method. Nevertheless, the order changes (pp. 23-26):

1. Having been prized and cherished (previously no. 4).
2. Having been affirmed to others (previously no. 5).
3. Having been chosen from among alternatives (previously no. 2).
4. Having been chosen after due reflection (previously no. 3).
5. Having been freely chosen (previously no. 1).
6. Having been incorporated into actual behaviour (previously no. 6).
7. Having been repeated in one's life (previously no. 7).

At first glance, there appears to have been little change in Raths' methodology;

however, there are two important considerations. The first is that the new order tends to make us consider the proposal more as a series of processes than as a verification. In fact, Raths called them *The Seven Criteria*, and now Kirschenbaum and Simon call them *The Seven Processes*. In Raths version, one first considers how one has chosen, and then whether what was chosen has been valued in terms of affect. In this reform, one first questions what it is that one wants or desires, and then the choice is made. With the criteria one thoughtfully considers a previously made choice, whereas with the processes one thoughtfully considers what one wants to choose.

The second consideration is the greatest emphasis placed on the affective realm in this new version. Raths also considered longings, desires, and preferences. Nevertheless, the analysis of feelings in relation to values is given greater consideration here, not only because they are at the beginning of the process, but also because their need for effective action is recognised (Kirschenbaum, 1973). Kirschenbaum and Simon (1973) emphasise the need to include the affective realm in moral education:

> We need people to find ways to help young people discover what it is important to them, to learn to set priorities, and to know what they are for or against. So much of our education forces us to deny our feelings and to distrust our inner experience. Valuing is not only a cognitive process. Education has to include the affective realm too. The future will hold many surprises. Unless people are capable of tuning into their own feelings, they will be ill-equipped to make the decisions that the future calls for. (p. 23)

6. Reception, criticism and responses

This methodology was received with great enthusiasm in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the area of Social Sciences (McClellan, 1999). It was an attractive proposal for teachers for three reasons: 1) using it does not require moral preparation; (2) a wealth of teaching and support materials was readily available; and (3) there was partial support in the form of State grants (Hunter, 2000). It quickly became the trending moral education proposal of the 1970s, despite the fact that it did not have sufficient philosophical and psychological reviews to verify its effectiveness. According to Sanderse (2012), a great deal of its success is due to the fact that this methodology considers children as people capable of reasoning what is and what is not worthwhile, instead of treating them as immature and ignorant, thus establishing an authoritarian relationship with them (p. 29).

In this period, more than forty books and hundreds of articles were written on Values Clarification. Kirschenbaum (2000) says that, from 1968, he gave hundreds of conferences and workshops on the subject, not only in the United States, but on all five continents. He co-authored four books and numerous articles and directed the *Values Clarification Trainers Network* for several years. Nearly half a million copies of Raths' book were sold, with Simon's *Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies* going on to outsell it, becoming the bestseller in moral education.

A frequent point of criticism on Values Clarification was that values should not be spoken about as being good or bad. The teacher, rather than making moral judgements about values, should encourage the freedom and authenticity of each student to discover and adopt their own values. In a critical study of this approach, Medina asserts that the teacher "should never convince, persuade, or place a particular option in a pre-eminent position. Their task is to encourage the unconditional free decision of the student in forming their own personal moral code" (2000, p. 6). Of course, always encouraging respect for the values discovered and adopted by other peers, communities or cultures. In a sense, all values are equally valid, provided that there are no values that interfere with the individual right to value what one discovers, adopts, wants or chooses. Interestingly, the pre-eminence accorded to the value of respect was not seen as an imposition.

Harmin and Simon (1967) respond to this criticism by arguing that it is not necessary for teachers to be silent about their own values. What they do consider necessary is going beyond the theoretical example, the anecdote, merely manifesting the consideration of what is right and what is wrong, since this is not enough to learn how to make choices when two or more values conflict (p. 525). The Values Clarification method suggests that the best way to learn to choose values is by *choosing them*, deliberating and facing the consequences. These authors are convinced that the key to finding authentic convictions and committing to them lies in developing the valuing process through practice.

Another point of criticism claimed that Values Clarification led to moral relativism. Critics argue that this model does not explicitly promote the search for moral truth, or any kind of consensus. They, therefore, consider that moral truth is *implicitly* denied. In practice, this moral education is void of content and does not propose a one-size-fits-all system of norms for life, or of *values* that make people grow and be happy. Escámez states that it cannot even be considered moral education, since it shies away from talking about what is good and bad for human beings: "it is not a strictly moral approach; the idea of moral values is relativistic and does not seem to distinguish between moral desires and moral preferences" (1996, p. 49). It seems that any opinion or personal preference is valid, as long as they tolerate and do not interfere with those of others.

In line with relativism, the failure to differentiate between moral decisions and personal issues of taste or preference is also criticised. Both Rath and Kirschenbaum's methods do not explicitly state a categorical difference between decisions such as stealing or lying, and wearing blue or going to the cinema on Sunday (Ryan, 1989). While each student is encouraged to reflect and discover that these decisions belong to different orders, one must consider the possibility that just the opposite may occur.

Kirschenbaum argues that this criticism is not entirely true, since both his and Raths' proposals included specific values from the outset. He underlines

that both he and Raths take as a basis a reaction to the consequences of the social indoctrination that took place in various countries and which led to the horrors of the Second World War, and so in order to avoid the danger of violently imposing absolute values, they preferred to seek the objective of developing a valuing process that would improve the quality of individual and social life (Kirschenbaum et al., 1975). However, along with this, Kirschenbaum (2000) states that the Values Clarification model implies education on highly important civic and moral values, such as respect, justice, empathy, honesty and integrity. He argues that the processes and strategies of Values Clarification implicitly include these civic and moral values (p. 12). For example, teaching students to listen carefully to others teaches the value of respect. By inviting consideration of others' points of view, fairness and empathy are encouraged. By encouraging students to bridge the gap between what they say and what they do, the values of honesty and integrity are taught. Proposing moral dilemmas conveys that it is important to reflect on morality. In short, Values Clarification states that it includes a moral context loaded with implicit values. Although not explicitly taught, these values were part of the hidden curriculum.

In addition, Lockwood (1978) states that Values Clarification does not give a clear definition of its objective: he finds it difficult to identify what exactly is sought with this methodology. This leads to a serious difficulty when it comes to evaluating it. Sanderse shares this opinion, consider-

ing that, in the absence of clear objectives and stages or levels of development, it is difficult to answer the questions that enable evaluation of moral education: What does a child goes through when its values are clarified? How can we distinguish between people who have clarified their values to different degrees? Which strategies fit which level of development?" (2012, p. 36). It must be conceded that, in a sense, it does specify its objective, which is to achieve greater identification and commitment to values, which is a difficult issue to evaluate. It is also true that, by not specifying any value, and accepting any value as valid, the objective seems to seek identification and commitment to *anything*, which is certainly ambiguous. Kohlberg and Simon support this view by arguing that, in the absence of clear objectives, it is not known whether Values Clarification works or not: "No one has ever assessed what good their work has done because they have no criteria of what developmental improvement would be." (1973, 64).

Ellrod presents a profound point of criticism from a philosophical point of view. Most of the rationale for Values Clarification is based on the fact that students are free to choose their values, without being influenced by the teacher or other external elements. Nevertheless, it is clear that children come to school with certain pre-existing values that have not been *freely* chosen most of the time. Therefore, certain steps of the model, such as those of prizing and cherishing, would be impossible if there were no pre-existing values, since it is precisely on this that any

current valuings depend. The criticism is that an attempt is made to reach a value-neutral judgement through a process that requires pre-existing valuings, the neutrality of which cannot be guaranteed. Therefore, the *neutrality* of the new values is compromised. According to Ellrod, this is the main point of criticism on Values Clarification from a philosophical point of view: "It is not clear what is supposed to be left free to operate 'naturally', once the field of one's valuings has been cleared and inhibitions removed, unless a pure, groundless existentialist choice is to be invoked" (1992, p. 17).

Another point of criticism is that Values Clarification inherits and contributes to the individualism of the time, breaking contact with others and with objectivity. In classical moral education, there was an emphasis on *us*, on the responsibility as a community to identify the good, the best, and to achieve it together. On the contrary Values Clarification seems to encourage each person to seek and achieve what they consider good, regardless of the others. Salls (2007) suggests that this methodology is partly responsible, along with other factors, for the individualism currently found in many adults and adolescents who view morality as something private and relative (p. 17).

7. The downfall

In the late 1970s, after analysing more than ten studies on the outcome of Values Clarification, Lockwood (1978) concluded that the impact of this methodology on students' self-esteem, self-concept, or personal adaptation could not be proven (p. 344). He also finds no evidence of an impact on the values that are developed. However, as we have seen, the methodology became popular and was implemented in many American schools, influencing the mentality of these generations and also social change. Kilpatrick (1992) sets out this view in a book whose title conveys a pressing concern: *Why Johnny can't tell right from wrong and what we can do about it*.

Given these points of criticism and assessments, it seems that Values Clarification did not achieve its goal. On the contrary, some claim that it worsened the social environment and contributed to the moral turmoil of the time. This moral education model lost its popularity almost as quickly as it gained it. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, Values Clarification had been discredited. Book sales declined, as did requests for courses and conferences. Regarding these years, Kirschenbaum (2000) states that a school principal would rather be accused of having asbestos in the classroom ceilings than it be thought that his school was teaching Values Clarification. The new trends were oriented towards traditional moral education and the renewed character education. Aware of the negative effects of his efforts, Harmin states that, looking back, "it would have been better had we presented a more balanced picture, had we emphasized the importance of helping students both to clarify their own personal values and to adopt society's moral values" (1988, p. 25).

After three decades of experience, Kirschenbaum (2000) decided to leave Values Clarification and join the character education movement. He admitted that for a long time he was so intent on avoiding *moralising authoritarianism* that he refused to see the negative effects of his proposal (p. 11). He was aware of the serious problems facing society: widespread confusion, moral decline, social disintegration, etc. At this point, he was convinced that the solution lay in the character education approach, "to teach, model, and facilitate the traits of character, moral virtues, civic values, and responsible self-direction on which our common future depends" (p. 18).

This author claims that he and his colleagues had very noble intentions. They wanted to solve the problem regarding the apathy and lack of commitment that was present in society in order to motivate moral behaviour. After much time and reflection, Kirschenbaum (2000) states that the big problem that caused Values Clarification to fail was the mistaken assumption that students had a rational moral *base* and were aware of traditional values with which they merely needed to identify:

> And so, belatedly, I recognised the fatal flaw in values clarification: It took traditional values for granted. It assumed that people had within them enough decent goodness, intuitive understanding of right and wrong, fairness and justice, and strength of character that, given a chance to identify their own deepest feelings and to thoughtfully examine the alternatives, they would ultimately make good and responsible choices. (p. 12)

8. Final comments

By way of conclusion, we will now set out three brief reflections on moral education. Although they are not new, they are reinforced by the study carried out in this article on Values Clarification, and may be of use to those practising or overseeing moral education today.

8.1. It is better to propose a moral view in schools than no moral view at all

The social climate of the time demanded morally neutral education that guaranteed moral freedom, without imposing convictions or indoctrinating students. In traditional approaches to moral education, the teacher proposed, based on their subjectivity or the common social *ethos*, the moral view that they considered to be the most correct. This, of course, influences students' moral development. However, it is also possible for the student to form a different opinion to that of the teacher, even a contrary one. On this point, I believe that not giving any opinion is less *liberating* than justifying a moral proposal, since the student is left adrift, without any role model. Silencing all opinions does not help to overcome their ignorance and, by not having any role model, the student becomes more vulnerable to potential manipulation by people or institutions for questionable purposes. The student is left defenceless in the face of *influences* that are often self-serving: corrupt politics, consumerism, peer pressure, and so on. The assessment that Values Clarification obtained in the end supports this argument.

8.2. Moral education cannot be avoided

There are those who think that schools can be *values-free*, that is to say,

that they can educate without affecting students' moral dimension. On the contrary, leaders of the character education movement such as Berkowitz (2012) or Lickona (1991) claim that *one cannot not educate morally* (intentional double negative). The mere presence of an adult has a moral influence on children, and much more so if they have a close relationship, such as that of student-teacher. There is no *off switch*: we always influence. Some do so strategically and intentionally, considering this dimension in their curriculum design; others prefer not to openly state their objectives. Nevertheless, if one cannot not have an influence on the character of students, it is a good idea to plan and direct the course. Although Values Clarification sought genuine neutrality, its authors agree that it was impossible to prevent its methodology and its dealings with students from implying — and demanding — a list of specific moral values.

8.3. A social agreement on moral values can be reached

The moral neutrality of education defends the supposed need for an education without values in order to guarantee freedom. The dominant educational mentality of that time was not capable of conceiving any sort of explicit teaching of moral values with no indoctrination or manipulation. However, this paper shows how Values Clarification was replete with implicit moral values, values that society agreed with and considered fundamental. This is not at all unusual: numerous studies show that there is common ethical ground, even in societies like ours, with so many contested values. We know there is conflict on issues such as abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia and capital punishment. Nevertheless, there are many shared values that make public moral education possible in a pluralistic society. Indeed, pluralism itself would not be possible without agreement on values such as justice, honesty, civic responsibility, democratic process and respect for truth. There is no need to abandon *all* moral education because of a lack of common agreement on certain contentious issues. Moreover, the possible solution to these conflictive issues lies, for the most part, in citizens integrating fundamental moral values into their lives, those that are essential for dialogue and the pursuit of the common good.

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Author biography

Juan P. Dabdoub. Assistant Professor in the School of Education and Psychology at the Universidad de Navarra, where he defended his doctoral thesis in 2019. He has been a member of the Education, Citizenship and Character Research Group since 2015. His research interests include the theory and practice of character education, educational leadership, and the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions that cultivate moral and civic virtue in school communities.

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3750-0685